

Ministering to Doubters and Dissenters

GERRIT DIRKMAAT

Well, brothers and sisters, I can honestly say it's the first time I've ever been introduced by a major general, so probably the last, hopefully. I want to just first of all take a moment to thank all of you for your service to your fellow man, to your communities, to your nations, and to your God. I really appreciate the sacrifice that all of you make.

I thought that I would start with something pretty interesting. When you're a historian and you're a one trick pony, you do that trick all the time. These are some of the interesting documents that we covered when we were going through the Joseph Smith Papers. These are some of the characters drawn off of the gold plates.

You can kind of go through them, and maybe you can have an idea of what each might be. We've got, you know, an upside-down birthday cake, upside-down birthday cake, upside-down birthday cake—a lot of upside-down birthday cakes. So to me, I'm thinking probably "And it came to pass," right? And then you've got a backwards fish head, backwards fish head, backwards fish—it's probably "Laman and Lemuel began sinning again," right?

I love this document because it speaks to the reality of the gold plates. Plates actually existed. Characters were drawn off of them. Joseph really was called do a great work.

But of course, when Joseph was called to do that great work, he was told by the angel who first spoke to him that "God had a work for me to do; and that my name should be had for good and evil among all nations, kindreds, and tongues, or that it should be both good and evil spoken of among all people" (Joseph Smith—History 1:33).

Now, I had a very interesting experience learning this when I first came to Utah. I finished my PhD at the University of Colorado and was hired by the Joseph Smith Papers Project. My wife and I moved to the Layton area. We were building a home there. But like all homes that have ever been built by anyone, ever, they weren't finished on time. And so, we were temporarily living in another ward, a ward that we knew we would only be in for a few months. My wife was pretty ill at the time with a pregnancy.

One Sunday I was at church, and it happened to be fast and testimony meeting. I want to tell you, especially in the presence of general officers and authorities, that I was paying very close attention to all the testimonies being borne. But I know exactly what I was doing, and I was changing my fantasy football lineup on my phone because I had just found out that my quarterback was injured, and I thought, well . . .

Well, my attention was taken away from my fantasy lineup pretty quickly as I heard someone get up and begin to bear a testimony. As he began to bear his testimony, immediately I could tell that this person was either not a member of our faith or a brand new member, had just been baptized by the missionaries and brought to this meeting, you know, using the phraseologies he was using as he told a story of the Holy Spirit coming into his heart.

So I was paying very close attention because, like I said, it was odd; it was different. I watched him go and sit down. As he sat down, another person who was sitting next to him, dressed very nice, went up. Only, this person had a stack of papers with him.

As he got up, he began to read through a litany of all the reasons why the Church is not true, for his testimony. They were the common reasons that come sometimes from evangelical Christians not of our faith. He proceeded to go through, you know, "The Bible says no man has seen God at any time, so anyone who claims in this area that Joseph Smith saw God is obviously a liar because that didn't happen."

Well, at this point I was paying a lot of attention. It just so happened that our bishop, wasn't there—he was out of town. Our first counselor was out of town, and our second counselor in the bishopric had actually just been called to be the second counselor. I think it was actually his first sacrament meeting that he was conducting.

As this man kept going through this obviously prepared attack on the faith, I was unsure of what was going to happen. The Counselor in the Bishopric eventually got up and whispered to the man, I'm guessing, "This isn't appropriate" or something like that, and the man simply shrugged his shoulders and continued going on: "Isaiah tells us there is no other God before him, but some people sitting here seem to think that there are other gods, and that's how you know that they're not—" and just kept going on.

It was obvious, as I saw, that there were multiple members of this group, that they had come in to take over the sacrament meeting. I saw the counselor send the little deacon runner out and I figured he was going to go find the stake president because we were meeting in the stake center.

Eventually the stake president came in. The stake president also whispered to the man. The man looked at him and just kept right on going. So at this point I thought, well, we're about to be on YouTube. (Laughter) I'm not sure what's going to happen, but I'm pretty sure this is not going to be good.

He had run out of material, and I saw his fellows, who also had reams of paper. They went to position themselves to bear the next testimony, but there was one fatal flaw in their plan. They hadn't attended enough fast and testimony meetings to realize how it works. They didn't realize you could go up on the stand to wait to bear the testimony, so they just were sitting in the front row.

And so, when the man closed, I sprinted from the back of the chapel to the podium, got there before any of them could get up. Then I simply filibustered the rest of the fast and testimony meeting. (Laughter) I gave a 35 minute testimony until I got kind of the okay sign from the stake president and then closed and we ended the meeting.

Now the whole time I was up there, I wasn't just reading the phone book, you know. I would love to tell you that I wasn't feeling a kind of anger, honestly, that here in my place of worship the Prophet Joseph Smith especially was being attacked as well as my faith. So I began to proceed point by point to respond to what the person said during his testimony.

The meeting closed. I went to my class which was held on the stage. As I was sitting in the back of the class, I could hear our stake president's very distinctive voice going from room to room, looking for someone that he thought was named Dirk Moss.

My last name is Dirkmaat, and it's a very Dutch name and it's very difficult to pronounce. I could hear him going from classroom to classroom because we had those little dividers in the gym, you know?

(Knocking on podium) "Is there a Dirk Moss? Is there a Brother Moss in here? Brother Moss?"

"No, I've never heard—no Brother Moss."

He kept going on. He eventually came, and I was sinking further and further in the chair at this point. He eventually came to the stage, knocked on the door, and said, "Is there a Brother Moss in here? A Dirk Moss?" I'm assuming what had happened is he asked the second counselor, "Who was that?" and the second counselor said, "Uh, Brother, uh, I think his name is Dirk—Dirk—Dirkmaat?" Right? So he thought my first name was Dirk and my last name was Moss.

As he came to the door, he said, "Is there a Brother Moss in here?" The teacher said, "No, there's not." And then he saw me in the back. "Brother Moss!" And he came striding over. Well, at this point, after someone's shouted your name incorrectly 20 or 30 times, you kind of gotta let them go with it, right? You know?

He said, “Brother Moss, I want to thank you so much for getting up and defending the Church.” He said, “Brother Moss, how did you know those things? You were telling stories about Joseph Smith that I’ve never heard before.” Of course, I was working on the Joseph Smith Papers, right? I was like, “I don’t know. Just lucky, I guess.”

(Laughter) I wanted the whole thing to end. And so he left.

Now the best part about that story is—actually, I don’t even know if it’s a part of the story, but—our house was finished almost immediately thereafter, and we never actually went back to that ward. (Laughter) So what I want to believe is that stake president went back to his office and looked on the Church records and saw that there was no “Dirk Moss.” There had never been a Dirk Moss in the stake.

He was there by himself. He seemed to know a lot about Joseph Smith, almost like he was there. One of the Three Nephites, right? (Laughter) So, if you ever hear a story out of Layton that says that, well, it was just me. (Laughter)

Now, the reality is people have been attacking Joseph Smith since even before the Book of Mormon was published. What I have before you now is the earliest lengthy account that there’s made of Joseph Smith receiving the plates and people’s reaction to them.

It’s made by a man by the name of Jonathan Hadley. Hadley is someone who Joseph approached to publish the Book of Mormon, but he was unable to do it. Hadley sent him to one of his friends up in Rochester, but the Rochester friend was also unable to do it. So Joseph eventually ended up publishing with E. B. Grandin.

But E. B. Grandin was Jonathan Hadley’s cross town rival. The Palmyra Freeman was the other newspaper in town, so he was quite irate when he found out that this \$3,000 was going to be flowing into the coffers of his political and economic enemy.

To give you an idea of how much money \$3,000 was at the time, Joseph Smith “owned” (we’ll put that in quotation marks)—he was paying on, just like I “own” my house (pretty sure Wells Fargo owns it), and if you miss a payment, they let you know who owns it—he owned a 14 acre farm that had a home on it. The entirety of the value of that was \$200, right? So the cost of printing the Book of Mormon was 15 times Joseph Smith’s entire worldly value, if he actually owned his home, when he didn’t, right? You can see that it was just this massive amount.

Well, when Hadley finds out that Joseph Smith is in fact going to his rival, he makes this very ardent attack. You can see by the date there. Maybe you can’t—I should’ve made this a little bit bigger—but you can see the date there. It’s August 11th, 1829. That’s three weeks before even the first word of the Book of Mormon is typeset. This is almost a year before there actually is a church. There is not a whole bunch of followers of Joseph Smith. There is basically his family, some of the Whitmers, Martin Harris every once in a while. There’s just no fear that there’s this great groundswell of support to follow after this, as he would call it, “Golden Bible” speculation.

I want to share with you a little bit about what he had to say. I know you probably weren’t anticipating coming here and having some anti material read to you, but I thought, this is how you don’t ever get asked to come again. (Laughter)

Now, he’s going to speak this tongue in cheek, but, like I said, this is the earliest account we have of many of these things.

“The greatest piece of superstition that has ever come within the sphere of our knowledge is one that has for some time past, and still occupies the attention of a few superstitious and bigoted individuals in this quarter.”

Back in the 19th century, the term bigoted meant uneducated. It meant dumb. It means that now, but it also has a different connotation now.

“It is generally known and spoken of as the Golden Bible. Its proselytes give the following account . . . : In the fall of 1827, a person by the name of Joseph Smith, of Manchester, Ontario County, reported that he had been visited in a dream by the spirit of the Almighty, and informed that in a certain hill in that town, was deposited this Golden Bible, containing an ancient record of divine nature and origin. After having been thrice thus visited, as he states—”

Now he starts to throw that in because he doesn't want anyone to think that he believes this. “This is just what he said to me,” right? “Of course I don't believe it,” right?

“He proceeded to the spot and . . . the Bible was found, together with a huge pair of Spectacles! He had been directed, however, not to let any mortal being examine them under no less penalty than instant death.”

He's laying it on pretty thick here, right?

“They were therefore, nicely wrapped up and excluded from the vulgar gaze of poor, wicked mortals. It was said that the leaves of the Bible were plates of gold, about eight inches long, six wide, and one eighth of an inch thick, on which were engraved characters or hieroglyphics. By placing the Spectacles into a hat, and looking into it, Smith could (he said so, at least,) interpret these characters.”

So this is his attack on the story of the gold plates. How is he doing? I mean, it's . . . it's fairly accurate. The sarcasm aside, I mean, he's basically telling the story fairly as closely as he's got it.

The reason why for that is that he doesn't perceive a threat from Joseph Smith or any of his followers. The reality is Joseph Smith is saying that an angel appeared to him. He thinks that's enough so that no one will ever believe him.

In fact, you might consider yourselves as, after you're leaving this meeting, terribly disappointed after my talk, if someone were to in the parking garage come up to you and say, “Hey, I just saw an angel,” your first response would probably be, “I don't think so.” You might not say that to them, but in your mind, “No.” And we're Latter day Saints. We literally believe in the ministering of angels, and yet if someone said, “I saw an angel,” you would probably say, “No, no. How much money do you need?” Right?

That's what Hadley thinks. He thinks the story's so preposterous, an angel's appearing to him! He says he found plates behind his house. He thinks no one's going to listen simply by the fact that he says that there's an angel involved.

Of course, Hadley, who hasn't seen the Book of Mormon yet (the Book of Mormon hasn't been published yet), knows Joseph Smith, so he thinks it's preposterous that someone like Joseph could produce a work equal to or superior to the Bible. In fact, he will say, as he closes off his little tirade:

“Now it appears not a little strange that there should have been deposited in this western world, and in the secluded town of Manchester [too], a record of this description: and still more so, that a person like this Smith”—you can see what he has there in parentheses—“(very illiterate) should have been gifted by inspiration to find and interpret it” (“Golden Bible,” Palmyra Freeman, Aug. 11, 1829).

For Jonathan Hadley, who knew Joseph Smith, he knew there was no way Joseph Smith could've produced some book like the Bible. But of course, there wasn't a Book of Mormon yet, so he just assumed that wouldn't ever actually happen and that no one would believe the story because it involves angels, it involves ancient prophets, it involves special interpretation instruments.

Then the Book of Mormon is published. After it's published, people begin to believe. The earliest attacks on Joseph after the Book of Mormon is published, one of the earliest, comes from Alexander Campbell, the founder of the Disciples of Christ. Campbell early on makes arguments that Joseph Smith must have written the entire Book of Mormon. Of course, Alexander Campbell doesn't know Joseph Smith.

Campbell, someone who is a Christian primitivist who believed absolutely that only the word of God could come from the Bible, thought the Book of Mormon couldn't be true simply because it's not the Bible. If it's not the Bible, then it's not true and, therefore, Joseph can't really have been a prophet. In fact, he's going to claim that "it is as certainly Smith's fabrication as Satan is the father of lies" (in Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* [1984], 125).

The problem is people continue to believe it. As people continue to believe it, you need a better explanation other than "This is crazy—no one will ever believe this" or "Only uneducated and stupid people could possibly believe this." In fact, this is what happens in Kirtland as the Saints arrive and there are hundreds who begin to convert, and then soon thousands. You're no longer able to simply say, "Only uneducated people would possibly believe this" because people that you know, that you respect, are becoming Latter day Saints.

At this point, I'd like to introduce you to someone in our story who has probably one of the greatest names in Church history. His name's Doctor Philastus Hurlbut. We don't have any images of him, unfortunately. We don't have any paintings, any sketches, so I've taken the liberty of creating some possible artist renditions. (Laughter) I'm not sure if any of them fit him.

Doctor Philastus Hurlbut could be called, in fact, perhaps the father of anti-Latter day Saint thought. Hurlbut was himself a Latter day Saint. He was an elder in the Church. He was sent on a mission to western Pennsylvania and there committed multiple adulteries and was excommunicated from the Church.

Oh, I should probably tell you, before we get too far down the road, that before you start thinking that Doctor Hurlbut perhaps has his PhD in history or theology, you should know that, in fact, that's his first name. His parents named him Doctor. I figure that would be like me naming my son "MVP of the NBA Finals Dirkmaat." (Laughter) You'd have to call him that—that's his name—and he looks like he might at some point make it there, right? You know, at least make it to Coldstone.

These are the minutes of the meeting in which Hurlbut was excommunicated, saying that because of his "unchristian conduct with [members of] the female sex," well, Hurlbut's going to be excommunicated ("Minutes, circa 1 June 1833," Minute Book 1, 12, josephsmithpapers.org). He'll actually be readmitted after begging forgiveness and begging Joseph to be lenient, and Joseph will let him in. He'll be excommunicated again—again for adultery. Only, this time, he will undertake a speaking circuit and tour to try to destroy Joseph Smith, claiming that he had inside information because he was an elder in "Mormonism," as he called it at the time.

In fact, Joseph Smith is going to—this is a letter Joseph writes—write about how difficult their times are because of Hurlbut. "We are suffering great persicution [sic] on account of one man by the name of Docter Hurlburt [sic]"—I love the fact he spelled his name wrong there—"who has been expeled [sic] from the chirch [sic]" ("Letter to Church Leaders in Jackson County, Missouri, 18 August 1833," 3, josephsmithpapers.org). That's probably how Joseph pronounced church, actually.

He spelled a lot of things phonetically. I know whenever we see a movie, we think of Joseph as having a nice Utah accent, but . . . he was born in Vermont, he's raised in New Hampshire, he grows up the rest of his life in New York. It's not "the church." It's "the chirch [sic]." (Laughter) So if you don't want to think of Joseph talking that way, you don't have to, but he seems to spell it that way a lot.

“He is lieing [sic] in a wonderful manner and the peapl [people] are running after him and giveing [sic] him mony [sic] to b[r]ake [break] down mormanism [sic] which much endangers <our lives> at preasnt [present]” (“Letter to Church Leaders in Jackson County, Missouri, 18 August 1833,” 3).

In fact, Hurlbut had claimed that he would wash his hands in the blood of Joseph Smith. That’s a claim and a charge that he makes publicly enough that he actually gets arrested for it, and actually at a time when Latter day Saints never get justice in the courts, he’s actually given essentially six months’ probation and ordered to pay a huge fine. So Joseph really did fear for his life.

Hurlbut is going to partner with a man by the name of Eber Howe. Eber Howe was the most prominent newspaper editor in the Ohio area. He is no fan of organized religion to begin with but even less a fan of Latter day Saints, with their claim to miracles and new scripture. He becomes even less a fan when his sister joins the Church, and then it’s personal. And then even less a fan when his wife joins the Church. Not only does his wife join the Church; his wife’s actually one of the women that we have on record as donating money to the Zion’s Camp march in 1834.

Howe will do everything he can to try to destroy the Church. He’ll pay Hurlbut to go back to Pennsylvania and New York, to collect as many negative affidavits as he can about Joseph Smith, the publication of the Book of Mormon, the Smith family, in order to discredit Joseph.

In a space of about four years, we’ve gone from people simply telling the story—because there’s no possible way anyone could believe it—to making character assassination attacks on Joseph because the problem was people were believing it. This is actually going to set the stage. This book that Howe will produce here, *Mormonism Unveiled*, will be the standard of antagonistic, anti-Latter day Saint literature for the remainder of the decade and even today. If anti-Latter day Saint literature has anything to do with the early days of Joseph Smith, you can almost guarantee it comes from this book collected by Philastus Hurlbut, the good doctor, and Eber Howe. Oh, this is the book here, if you wanted to take a look at it.

What I wanted to reference is that the reality is we are fighting a war. President Hinckley in 1986 referenced in a talk “The War We Are Winning” that the War in Heaven continues on earth, a battle for men and women’s souls. He’s going to quote Wilford Woodruff in his 1896 general conference address where Wilford Woodruff says, “There are two powers on the earth and in the midst of the inhabitants of the earth—the power of God and the power of the devil. . . . When God has . . . a people on the earth, it matters not in what age, Lucifer, the son of the morning, and the millions of fallen spirits that were cast out of [the] heaven, have warred against God, against Christ, against the work of God, and against the people of God. And they are not backward in doing it in our day and generation. Whenever the Lord set His hand to perform any work, [these] powers labored to overthrow it” (“Remarks,” *Deseret Evening News*, Oct. 17, 1896, 9).

I think that that’s something that we all experience in our various walks of life. Certainly you do as you minister to Latter day Saints who might be struggling in their faith.

What is antagonistic material like today? You probably already know—and I apologize if for so much of what I’m saying you’re nodding your head, saying, “Yes, of course, I already know this”—but I like to call it actually “Gotcha!” antagonistic material or anti-Latter day Saint material.

The point today is no longer like the people taking over my fast and testimony meeting to convince people of a different kind of Christianity. In general, the point is today to cause people to lose faith entirely by presenting them, to sow the seeds of doubt, with an idea or a different strange sounding historical fact that the members of the Church haven’t heard before and placing it in a negative context.

For instance, “You know Joseph Smith put magic rocks in a magic hat to translate the Book of Mormon, don’t you? How can you believe that? That’s just crazy.” Right? The idea being that the person that is so confronted will not even know about that, will then feel undermined in their faith, and then possibly precipitate a faith crisis. This is something that happens to people. So I’d like to spend a little bit of time to provide some ways that we might be able to respond when we are confronted with that.

When we’re ministering to those with doubts, I think it’s first and foremost important that we prepare ourselves “by study and also by faith” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:118). No one can know everything. Well, obviously the Lord can, but no one in mortality can. The reality is we study, we try, we pray, we hope, but there are simply things that we just don’t know and we won’t know. That doesn’t mean that we can’t take steps to come to know some of the things that the Church has provided materials for us to know.

In an address to CES educators, of course they’re speaking primarily to Institute students, but I think for many of the people you minister to this might feel also appropriate. Elder, and now President, Ballard gave some information that I think is helpful.

“It was only a generation ago that our young people’s access to information about our history, doctrine, and practices was basically limited to materials printed by the Church. Few students came in contact with alternative interpretations. Mostly, our young people lived a sheltered life.

“Our curriculum at that time, though well meaning, did not prepare students for today—a day when students have instant access to virtually everything about the Church from every possible point of view” (M. Russell Ballard, “The Opportunities and Responsibilities of CES Teachers in the 21st Century” [evening with a General Authority, Feb. 26, 2016]).

Elder Ballard went on to say that “Church leaders today are fully conscious of the unlimited access to information, and we are making extraordinary efforts to provide accurate context and understanding of the teachings of the Restoration. A prime example of this effort is the 11 Gospel Topics essays on [ChurchofJesusChrist.org] that provide balanced and reliable interpretations of the facts for controversial and unfamiliar Church related subjects” (M. Russell Ballard, “The Opportunities and Responsibilities of CES Teachers in the 21st Century”).

As he explains those, he also gives some other resources. He says:

“You should also become familiar with the Joseph Smith Papers website and the Church history section on [ChurchofJesusChrist.org] and other resources by faithful [Latter day Saint] scholars.

“The effort for gospel transparency and spiritual inoculation through a thoughtful study of doctrine and history, coupled with a burning testimony, is the best antidote we have to help [members] avoid [or] deal with questions, doubt, or faith crises they may face in this information age” (M. Russell Ballard, “The Opportunities and Responsibilities of CES Teachers in the 21st Century”).

All of you minister to different groups at different times, but the reality of the information age and the antagonistic attacks that come upon those that we love, those who are sometimes struggling members of our faith, have this common denominator. We live in a different time. I think it’s important that we know how to respond.

So, first of all, we prepare ourselves by studying those Gospel Topics essays, becoming acquainted with them. The Church has spent considerable time and effort to provide them. They’re also in your Gospel Library app. You can access them under “Church History” in the Gospel Library app, the Gospel Topics essays. They approach many of these sometimes-controversial subjects.

It's also important that we respond with empathy and love. It is difficult when someone is perhaps attacking our faith to maintain that. In the late Nauvoo period, there were all kinds of people dissenting, people apostatizing from the Church.

In one of the last public addresses he gave, our first Latter day Saint chaplain, Hyrum Smith, who was chaplain of the Nauvoo Legion—you can see him there—and also co president of the Church in 1844, gives a talk that provides some insight. I'm sorry—it's a little rough because the person taking the notes on the talk doesn't get every article in there, but I still believe it's something valuable.

“We are apt to suffer prejudice to get into our hearts on hearing reports—we never should [do] it, never should pass . . . judgment until we hear both sides. . . . If we hear [that such a brother] is rather inclined to apostasy, don't let prejudice arise, but pray for him—God may feel after him and he may return; never speak reproachfully or disrespectfully—he is in the hand of God. I am one of those peace makers who take a stand above these little things. . . .

“. . . Never undertake to destroy men because they do some evil thing. . . . We ought to be careful what we say, and take the example of Jesus, [and] cast over the mantle of charity and try to cover their faults. We are made to enlighten and not to darken one another; save [and] not destroy” (“Conference Minutes,” *Times and Seasons*, Aug. 1, 1844, 597; spelling and punctuation modernized).

Those people who come to you with faith crises will often come to you troubled. They will come to you upset. They will come to you feeling that what they thought they knew for so long has been pulled out from under them because that is the point of the adversary and these antagonistic attacks. Know that they are looking for answers and that they are children of God, men and women who certainly can have the truth of the Spirit re enlightening their lives.

You can then help them find answers, emphasizing that learning comes “by study and also by faith” (*Doctrine and Covenants* 88:118). For all the things that we can read, all the answers we can give, of course, only the Holy Spirit can give the answer to the question that we all need most: the truths about God ultimately can only be known by the Holy Spirit. No matter how much we study or how little, the only way we can come to know many of them is through the Holy Spirit of God.

Now we can prepare and guide and help them as you use the Gospel Topics essays. These are the topics there of the Gospel Topics essays—one of them, if you remember the antagonistic attack that I brought up, “Oh, you think Joseph Smith used magic rocks and a magic hat?” Well, one of our Gospel Topics essays that the Church has produced is on the Book of Mormon translation. Having read that before you encounter this, you'll have ways to respond and minister to these people who are struggling. You'll have a resource that you can direct them to as well as, of course, the Book of Mormon itself. Because the ultimate proof of whether or not this is the word of God comes from God.

Sometimes we're afraid of knowledge. I've often had people ask me, “Oh, in all your time studying, you have worked on the Joseph Smith Papers now for almost a decade.” People will sometimes, after a fireside, come up to me and whisper softly, “Have you ever read anything up there that's ever made ya, you know, kind of question whether or not Joseph is a prophet?”

I can say unequivocally that has not happened. In fact, I can't count the number of times as I'm reading a letter, a diary, the minutes of a meeting that Joseph is speaking in, that the Holy Spirit has spoken to my mind that this man is a prophet of God.

The reality is, the more knowledge we gain, the more likely we are to be able to handle difficult fiery darts of the adversary. “Knowledge,” as Joseph taught, “does away with darkness, suspense and doubt.” Where knowledge is, there is no doubt, nor suspense, nor darkness. “In knowledge there is power. God has more power than all other beings, because he has greater knowledge” (Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith [2007], 265).

You will find in your attempts to minister to those with doubts, those who are struggling, that oftentimes they may be too far down the rabbit hole at that moment, too far convinced that perhaps their faith is erroneous, that they may not listen. Faith is a choice.

As Alma teaches us in the Book of Mormon, you have to have a desire to believe. All the great learning in the world can’t convince anyone if they aren’t willing to allow the Holy Spirit into their heart. Maybe one of the ways we need to prepare ourselves is for when they don’t listen.

I counsel with people all the time at the request of those who are hoping that talking about the early Church history with them or their loved one might help right someone’s path that they’re on. Sometimes there are great successes, and other times I’m a spectacular failure. I’m desperately trying to help people see that this is God’s true Church, but I’m not always successful in that.

It’s important that we show to those people that even if they don’t believe, God still loves them. This plan of happiness is for them, even if they don’t accept it.

I one time met with a couple a few years ago, after I got to BYU. She was already ready to remove her name from the Church. He was struggling but thought he would need to follow his wife out. I met with them for several hours as we discussed their concerns about Church history. I bore testimony as best I could. After that meeting was over, I went away feeling that I had failed, that despite my education and my learning I had not convinced these people that this was God’s Church. I hadn’t been able to remove that impediment that kept the Spirit from touching their heart.

I received an email from a colleague earlier this year, telling me, “Do you know—?” and the name of these people. I thought, “Yeah.” He said, “Well, they just moved to my ward. They left the Church several years ago. They told me that they never could get out of their mind, though, the meeting that they had with you and the way that they felt. So though they’d left the Church, they’ve been re-baptized and they’re now fully active in our ward.”

You don’t know what the end result of your ministering will be. You may be like Abinadi and have people seemingly reject everything that it is that you have to say, but you don’t know how the long term results of your efforts might be. Even if it appears that that outcome isn’t great, remember that these are children of God. Hopefully you’ve planted a seed of faith and love them no matter what.

As chaplains, you all experience working with those of other faiths. You have this innate ability to reach out to people who don’t believe what you believe but still carry with them the love of Jesus. That’s the most beautiful thing about what you do.

I want to share with you a little bit from a talk that Joseph Smith gave on religious liberty. This was from the Council of Fifty minutes that recently was published by the Church. It’s one of the Joseph Smith Papers volumes that I worked on.

A quote that I want you to notice that comes out of it is this one here, where Joseph, talking about those that aren’t of our faith, says, “We must not despise a man on account of infirmity. We ought to love a man more for his infirmity” (Council of Fifty, Minutes, March 1844–January 1846; Volume 1, 10 March 1844–1 March 1845, 119, josephsmithpapers.org).

So much our natural human tendency is to do the opposite, is to try to push away from those who don't believe or reject what we have to say. But the Prophet Joseph was a lover of people, and he loved people whether they agreed with him or not, whether they joined the Church or not, whether they followed all of the Church's principles or not.

In fact, as I have a little time, I'll share this with you. The Council of Fifty was designed to prepare the place that they were moving to. They were leaving the United States. They were going to go somewhere else and set up a kingdom of God on earth. There were some nonmembers that were members of this council preparing to leave with them.

As Joseph quoted (this is William Clayton recording Joseph speaking): "He . . . went on to say that for the benefit of mankind and succeeding generations, he wished it to be recorded that there were admitted members of this honorable council who are not members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter day Saints, neither profess any creed or religious sentiment whatever"—I'll give you a little visual on it—"to show that in the organization of this kingdom men are not consulted as to their religious opinions or notions in any shape or form whatever, and that we act upon the broad and liberal principle that all men have equal rights and ought to be respected, and that every man has a privilege in this organization of choosing for himself voluntarily his God, and what he pleases for his religion, inasmuch as there is no danger but that every man will embrace the greatest light.

"God cannot save or damn a man only on the principle that every man acts, chooses, and worships for himself; hence the importance of thrusting from us every spirit of bigotry and intolerance towards a man's religious sentiments, that spirit which has drenched the earth with blood. When a man feels the least temptation to such intolerance he ought to spurn it from him.

"It becomes our duty on account of this intolerance and corruption—the inalienable right of man being to think as he pleases, worship as he pleases, etc., being the first law of everything that is sacred—to guard every ground all the days of our lives. I will appeal to every man in this council, beginning at the youngest, that when he arrives to the years of hoary age he will have to say that the principles of intolerance and bigotry never had a place in this kingdom, nor in my breast, and that he is even then ready to die rather than yield to such things. . . . We must not despise a man on account of infirmity. We ought to love a man more for his infirmity. Nothing is more congenial to my feelings and principles than the principles of universal freedom and has been from the beginning. If I know that a man is susceptible of good feelings and integrity and will stand by his friends, he is my friend. The only thing I am afraid of is that I will not live long enough to enjoy the society of these my friends as long as I want to.

"Let us from henceforth drive from us every species of intolerance. . . . When I have used every means in my power to exalt a man's mind, and have taught him righteous principles to no effect, he is still inclined [to] his darkness, yet the same principles of liberty and charity would ever be manifested by me as though he [had] embraced it" (Council of Fifty, Minutes, March 1844–January 1846; Volume 1, 10 March 1844–1 March 1845, 116–20; spelling and punctuation standardized).

In closing, I'd like to say, in my efforts at researching, one of the things that I did last summer, I was at the Huntington Library in California. The Huntington Library happens to have the pioneer diaries of Eliza R. Snow—Eliza R. Snow, the prophetess of Zion, one of my heroes in Church history, someone who (once she came to know the truth) put her hand to that plow and she never looked back. It didn't matter that she lost many homes, that she lost her friends, that she was constantly ridiculed. Here is that little diary that she carried across the plains, to show you how small it is. You can see where her little hands were wrapped around this, as she carried it forward every day.

One of the things that I like to impress upon people who are feeling a moment of doubt and a faith crisis is these people who knew Joseph and Brigham, who knew them best, were certain they were prophets of God. We owe

something to them. We owe to Eliza R. Snow, for her faith, that we don't casually toss away ours, that we at least take the time to find out if the two thousand miles she walked was worth it, if the difficulties she suffered in life were worth it.

I bear you my testimony that I know that Joseph Smith was a prophet, that this is God's Church, that Russell M. Nelson's a prophet of God. There are many doubters and dissenters in this world. Many of them will say, "If only you knew what I know, then you wouldn't believe." It's offensive to me because, having studied as much of Joseph Smith's writings as I can, everything that I know that he has that's written, I know that Joseph's a prophet.

More importantly, I know that all of us can know and those we minister to can know. It's not by reading everything that Joseph ever wrote. It's by the Holy Spirit of God, by trusting in the faith of those who have it until we have stronger faith, that we can know that this is God's Church. I say this in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.